

# The perfect fit

Escorted tours are no longer set in stone. Joanna Booth discovers how to tailor a trip to suit any client

**O**ne-size-fits-all only really works for ponchos. For everything else – sartorial or otherwise – something with a bit more flexibility is far more comfortable.

On holiday, guests are much happier when they're doing what they want, rather than what they're told. People take life at

a different pace, have various interests, and even sometimes just wake up in the morning and fancy a change.

However, this can be tricky for escorted touring providers. How do you run a communal holiday if everyone is trying to do something different? It's all a matter of balance. Whether it

concerns travel, food or activities, operators are increasingly trying to leave a little wriggle room for personal choice.

#### ▶ ACTIVITY CHOICES

Plenty of operators offer optional excursions on tours – activities not included in the original price and itinerary but that can be

added on to suit an individual. For a client on a Riviera Travel tour, this might be touring Florence by night in a classic Fiat 500, or taking in a performance of the Russian Ballet in Moscow. For Cox & Kings' customers, it could be hot-air ballooning over Jaipur, or trekking in Chile's Torres del Paine national park. →



Torres del Paine national park, Patagonia

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## ESCORTED TOURS TAILORING TOURS DESTINATIONS

# 5 EASY TAILORING TRICKS

### 1. Choose a travel style to suit

Shearings trips can be joined via air or coach.

### 2. Make the journey smooth

Leger Holidays offers a door-to-door pick-up service, so clients are looked after the second they leave home.

### 3. Cater to different tastes

Collette's Dine On Tour option allows guests to eat in a range of restaurants, all included in the price.

### 4. Choose a departure with a difference

Newmarket Holidays advises selecting a date that coincides with events such as the Calgary Stampede or Holi festival in India.

### 5. Give solos space

Operators such as Explore allow clients travelling alone to upgrade to their own room.

**RIGHT:** Monument Valley

**BELOW:** Russian ballet



➔ Trafalgar tours build in free time for clients to either do their own thing or take part in an optional activity – a Chopin recital in Warsaw, or via the operator's new partnership with VizEat, the chance to wine and dine with locals around the world.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, youth operator Topdeck finds a lot of its most popular optional extras are active, from skydiving in the Swiss Alps to diving on the Great Barrier Reef.

Journey Latin America prides itself on finding the perfect extra



PICTURE: FRANZ MARC FREI

“Some clients prefer to pay less and not have so many inclusions, so they can pick and choose on arrival

to suit each client, however obscure. When a group of farmers travelling on one of its tours had no interest in the typical excursions, the operator organised for them to visit a local cattle farm, where they stayed up until the small hours feasting on barbecue and swapping tales with the owner.

▶ **TIMING DECISIONS**  
Flexibility isn't just about what you let people choose to do – it also concerns when you let them make their choices. Grand American Adventures says clients like to make decisions on tour, so it allows customers to choose and pay locally for experiences including Navajo-guided tours of Monument Valley and white-water rafting on Kicking Horse River.

Cosmos agrees that many guests like to decide on tour, particularly if they make friends and want to join an activity that the other clients have chosen

to take part in. But to cater for those who like to plan ahead, the operator is also moving to allow customers to pre-book and pre-pay for optional extras six weeks prior to departure.

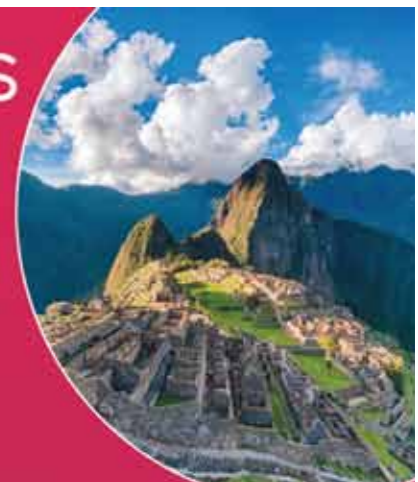
For clients who want choice without having to worry about extra costs, there is APT's Freedom of Choice sightseeing option. Available on its luxury journeys, up to four excursions will be available in destinations, as variable as biking tours, wine tasting, painting classes and golf, all included as part of the initial holiday package.

Some clients prefer to pay less and not have so many inclusions, and Explore's new Family Lite range will appeal to them. The initial cost is lower, and then guests can pick and choose which inclusions will suit their pocket and interests on arrival.

▶ **STOPOVERS AND CITY STAYS**  
Being flexible with flights can add a great aspect to a tour. Abercrombie & Kent reports many clients choosing to fly out a little early to acclimatise to the time difference and be on top form when the group tour starts. Most companies are happy to tag on a few days pre- or post-tour, so that clients can extend the trip with their own private city break. Stopovers can be sensible ➔

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LEFT: Cookery class

RIGHT: Bear-spotting in Canada

FAR RIGHT: New England



PICTURE: SUPERSTOCK

“Some clients will want to follow a busy touring itinerary with a beach extension

Amazon regularly tacked on to longer tours.

Explore has recently created a Uruguay extension that can be added to any Argentina tour, while InsideAsia Tours has a range of new add-ons designed to fit its small-group touring programme. These provide contrasts to the tours, such as the Mountains and Monkeys add-on that introduces tradition and time in nature, a welcome accompaniment to the HyperJapan J-Pop & Go itinerary, which predominantly explores modern Japanese culture.

Some clients will want to follow a busy touring itinerary with a beach extension, and this is easily done in many locations, from three nights in a bay overlooked by Mount Etna after Travelsphere's Secret Sicily tour, to four nights on Ngwe Saung's beautiful beaches, at the end of Just You's Burma & The Road to

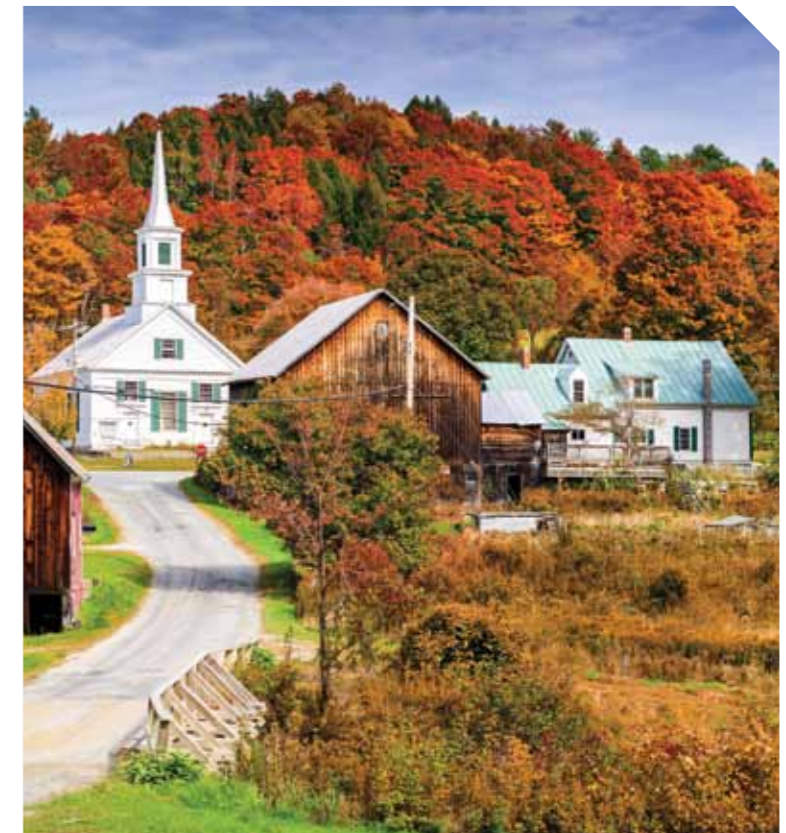
Mandalay trip. Great Rail Journeys finds its Goa extension fits well with many of its Indian itineraries.

▶ **BACK TO BACK**

Gluttons for discovery may want to combine more than one itinerary into a kind of super-tour.

Kuoni has a new range of combinable group tours in Latin America, Asia and Africa, so clients can construct their own journey. Twin-tour combinations are the most popular, but in Indochina it's even possible for customers to build a 40-day adventure travelling through five southeast Asian countries.

Collette finds that back-to-back bookings happen most regularly on its tours in New England, while Great Rail Journeys reports that Australia and New Zealand tours are frequently booked in tandem, so clients can make the most of the long flights. **tw**



tailoring tricks. Wendy Wu Tours finds clients flying with Cathay Pacific regularly choose to add time in Hong Kong, and the operator suggests combining this with a visit to Macao to add an interesting counterpoint. Its customers who use Emirates frequently spend extra days in Dubai.

With many of Great Rail Journeys' clients joining their European tours via Paris, Cologne and Brussels, there are frequent requests to weave in a city break on the way.

Titan Travel reports that extensions are popular in North America, with extra nights in New York, Boston, Las Vegas,

San Francisco and Vancouver particularly common. The operator's wildlife add-ons also attract plenty of bookings, with whale-watching and bear-spotting pulling in punters.

▶ **ADDING CONTRAST**

Hitting a highlight not included on the tour can be another

useful function of an additional stay. Insight Vacations can help clients tick off some bucket-list experiences, with bolt-ons including a journey on the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express and a visit to Victoria Falls. Intrepid Travel finds its range of short breaks are often used as added extras, with trips to Uluru and the

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